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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR  
TAGS: PARM, TRGY, MNJC, ENRG, KSCA, AR  
SUBJECT: ARGENTINE NUCLEAR POLICIES: FOREIGN MINISTER  
CAPUTO'S RESPONSE TO SENATOR PERCY

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. IN A MEETING FEBRUARY 27 BETWEEN SCIENCE COUNSELOR AND ADOLFO SARACHO, DIRECTOR OF THE FOREIGN MINISTRY'S OFFICE OF NUCLEAR AFFAIRS AND DISARMAMENT, SARACHO EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER THE RECENT EXCHANGE OF LETTERS BETWEEN SENATOR PERCY AND FOREIGN MINISTER CAPUTO. THE NUCLEAR ISSUE HERE WAS AN EXTREMELY SENSITIVE AND TOUGH ONE FOR ALFONSIN, SARACHO SAID. PUBLIC OPINION WAS RUNNING STRONGLY AGAINST ANY MOVES IN THE NUCLEAR AREA BY THE NEW GOVERNMENT THAT COULD BE INTERPRETED AS RELINQUISHING ARGENTINE NUCLEAR AUTONOMY. THE EXTENT OF THIS PUBLIC CONCERN WAS DRIVEN HOME WHEN LABOR LEADERS IN THEIR MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT UNEXPECTEDLY RAISED THE NUCLEAR ISSUE, ASKING ALFONSIN NOT TO SACRIFICE ARGENTINE SOVEREIGNTY BEFORE U.S. PRESSURE. THAT, HE SAID, CAME AS A SHOCK. WITHIN THE NEXT FEW DAYS, THE PERONISTS WERE EXPECTED TO TABLE IN CONGRESS THEIR OWN RESOLUTION STRONGLY SUPPORTIVE OF THE NUCLEAR PROGRAM.

3. GIVEN THE INTERNAL SITUATION HERE, SARACHO ASSERTED THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO RESPOND IN STRONG TERMS TO SENATOR PERCY'S LETTER. HAD THE CONTENTS OF THE PERCY LETTER BEEN MADE PUBLIC, IT WOULD CERTAINLY HAVE BEEN VIEWED BY RADICALS AND PERONISTS ALIKE AS A U.S. ATTEMPT TO PRESSURE ARGENTINA. THE PERCY LETTER REFLECTED "THE SAME OLD LINE" THAT THE UNITED STATES HAD BEEN HITTING ARGENTINA WITH FOR YEARS' THE U.S. THEREFORE SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN SURPRISED TO RECEIVE THE SAME OLD ARGENTINE LINE IN RETURN.

4. SARACHO MAINTAINED THAT, DESPITE THE RUMORS IN THE PRESS, THE FOREIGN MINISTRY WAS NOT TRYING TO LINK THE

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NUCLEAR ISSUE WITH OTHER BILATERAL AREAS (I.E., THE DEBT  
AND FALKLANDS/MALVINAS). THERE WAS NO DOUBT, HOWEVER,  
THAT SOME FAVORABLE U.S. SIGN, INCLUDING PROGRESS IN  
BILATERAL NUCLEAR RELATIONS, WOULD BE HELPFUL IN  
ENABLING ARGENTINAA TO MOVE POSITIVELY IN THE NUCLEAR AREA.

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END OF MESSAGE

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